

Special Report

What is the nature of the Word of God? How are we to understand the collection of writings which make up the Holy Bible? Was God primarily concerned about revealing through His inspired spokesmen what He has done for our salvation in Jesus Christ, the Center of this miraculous revelation about whom each recorded historical event revolves? Or are we to believe that from cover to cover every word, statement, and narrative of the Scriptures corresponds to truth in all realms of mind and matter? Who is to determine, and on what basis, which passages or portions of Holy Writ are to be taken literally and which are to be understood in a figurative sense?

This problem and related questions, posed by Barth, Brunner, and other neo-orthodox theologians, have been occupying students and teachers of the divine Word. What is more, they have come to the attention of Christian laymen through newspapers and periodicals.

San Francisco's Protestant Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike, whose controversial statements appear with some regularity in the daily press, is quoted by *Time* (Feb. 24, 1961, p. 48) as saying that the Gospel "is largely communicated by means of a myth — not in the sense of an untrue fable ('A good myth is true'), but in the sense of a form used to express complicated and difficult truth, such as the Garden of Eden." [*Shades of Bultmann!*]

Members of the United Lutheran Church in America recently read in the *Lutheran*: "The Bible was written in the thought forms of a particular time. The men who wrote it were confined to the ancient conception of the universe, according to which the earth was the center of the world, around which the sun revolved in the vault of heaven.

"Large parts of the Bible are accounts of historical events. These events were experienced by men, stored in human memories, retold by men, and written down by men. The abilities of these men were not of divine perfection. None of the Biblical writers makes this claim concerning his work.

"These facts make it clear that the doctrine of the so-called verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures does not accord with reality. . . . This doctrine not only contradicts the Biblical facts; it is also at variance with the spirit of the Christian faith.

"In the Christian view the revelation of God in this world does not appear in a collection of timeless divine communications and decrees, which man can utilize as a 'God between the covers of a book,' exploit like an infallible medicine cabinet, or consult section by section like an eternally valid book. No, God reveals Himself in the history of living men, and only he who meets this history as a living man can recognize in and behind

this human history the history of the divine revelation." (From *Conversation on Faith* by Eberhard Mueller [head of the Evangelical Academy in Bad Boll, Germany], in the translation of John W. Doberstein, copyrighted by the Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, used by permission.)

Since 1958 members of the St. Louis seminary faculty have engaged in a study of Biblical answers to the theological problem raised by questions concerning the form in which the Scriptures convey their message and the purpose of their message. The study culminated in "A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures," unanimously adopted by the faculty and published in the October 1960 issue of *Concordia Theological Monthly*.

While the entire faculty participated in the discussion of a series of eight papers on the Word of God and in the formulation of the "Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures," a number of its members were especially active. Among them is Dr. Martin Franzmann, chairman of the department of exegetical theology, whose book *Follow Me* is just off the press and who, together with Dr. Erwin Lueker, was on the drafting committee for the faculty's statement. Another is Dr. Richard R. Caemmerer, secretary of the faculty, who has brought essays on the Word of God to several District conventions. A third is Dr. Paul M. Bretscher, graduate professor of New Testament interpretation, whose essay "Take Heed unto the Doctrine" was delivered at the San Francisco convention in 1959.

Dr. Martin H. Scharlemann, professor of New Testament interpretation, was especially active in studying the nature of revelation. To subject his findings to the critical review of brethren, Dr. Scharlemann presented exploratory essays to the St. Louis faculty, pastoral conferences, and other groups.

Statements from these essays have been widely quoted; frequently they have been quoted out of their context. To state, for example, that Dr. Scharlemann in a paper prepared only for faculty discussion said: "In this paper I propose to defend the paradox [a statement seemingly self-contradictory] that the Book of God's truth contains errors" would be correct. But this is only the opening sentence of his paper. He immediately adds: "What is more, I hope to show that by the proper resolution of this paradox we in fact magnify the truth that comes to us by divine revelation. What is set forth here is necessarily devoted to what is called 'the human side' of that revelation."

Because of his exploratory essays, also because of his article "God Is One" in the August 1959 issue of the *Lutheran Quarterly*, Dr. Scharlemann was accused of teaching false doctrine. Individuals and groups re-

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quested the President of Synod and the St. Louis seminary Board of Control to dismiss Dr. Scharlemann from the seminary faculty.

To give members of the Missouri Synod a firsthand account of developments, the WITNESS offers the following "Special Report — Theological Problem," based on interviews with Dr. Scharlemann, St. Louis seminary president Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Board of Control members Dr. George W. Wittmer (chairman) and Rev. Gerhardt E. Nitz (vice-chairman), and members of Synod's *Praesidium*.

Revelation, Not Inspiration

One thing should be kept clearly in mind, Dr. Scharlemann told the WITNESS. "The problem," he said, "is revelation, not inspiration."

Reiterating what he has said in published statements, the St. Louis professor declared: "I have always believed in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Every word of the Scriptures is the word of God. It is God who speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures."

The crucial theological issue of our time, an issue raised by the noted Swiss theologian Karl Barth, is the concept of revelation, especially as it is related to inspiration, Dr. Scharlemann added.

"Very little has been done by our church in this field," he emphasized, and revelation "is not mentioned in the *Brief Statement*."

"I have a call to teach the Scriptures," Dr. Scharlemann said, "not only to the students but also to the church. It is my work to lecture, to do research, to explore the nature of the Scriptures. As I said before, we have developed no major work on principles of interpreting the Scriptures [hermeneutics]."

The doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration, according to the 50-year-old theologian, does not assure the proper understanding of the Scriptures and does not solve the problem of revelation. "Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists believe in verbal inspiration. They believe every word of the Bible is inspired by God. Yet they misapply and misuse the Scriptures. The Jews believed the Old Testament was the Word of God. They knew it well. Yet the Jews did not see Jesus in the Scriptures."

Overemphasis on the doctrine of verbal inspiration, says Dr. Scharlemann, brought with it the use of the term "inerrant," an expression "which the Bible does not use of itself."

In one of his essays he had questioned the propriety and wisdom of "imposing on the Scriptures" a "con-

temporary definition of truth," truth in the sense of "precision" in historical and natural information.

According to Dr. Scharlemann's view of the nature of revelation, the Biblical authors were "not primarily interested in giving comprehensive information. God chose to limit Himself by using certain men who lived at a certain time, just as He chose to limit Himself in the incarnation."

When God used certain individuals to reveal His will, Dr. Scharlemann explained, "He used them where they were. He spoke through them in terms of the knowledge of their particular time."

To summarize his view of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, Dr. Scharlemann quotes a statement "devised by our Australian brethren":

"This inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something that is hidden and not obvious. We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant. The term 'inerrancy' has no reference to the variant readings found in the textual sources because of copyists' errors or deliberate alterations; neither does it imply an absolute verbal accuracy in quotations and in parallel accounts, such absolute conformity evidently not having been part of God's design. We believe that the holy writers, whom God used, retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions of life, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy). God made use of them in such a manner that even that which human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scriptures must serve the divine purpose."

Asked why he delivered "exploratory essays," the St. Louis seminary instructor answered that he did so, always at the invitation of a pastoral conference or other group, to "discuss with brethren" the findings of his studies in the field of revelation. He believed that such discussions would help him clarify matters, especially for the preparation of a major work on hermeneutics.

"At first I spoke from an outline," he said. Later he developed his materials into essays titled "The Bible as Record, Witness, and Medium of Revelation" and "Revelation and Inspiration."

"In introducing my presentations," said Dr. Scharlemann, "I always made it clear that what I was saying and reading was of an exploratory nature only and was not to be construed as the last word on the subject under discussion."

In sending out copies of an essay in answer to requests, he appended a letter which said in part that

the essay "is an attempt to thread a solid path through all the discussion in contemporary theology on the nature of the Bible. . . . This does not mean that it is intended to be the final word on the matter. On the contrary, this paper is intended to elicit reaction.

"No one is more concerned than the author himself that our church lose nothing of its doctrinal interest and concerns. This is the strength of our Synod. At the same time we must all become more aware of the fact that theology moves, that we must not and cannot be content to talk about the Scriptures in 1959 as though we were living in 1759 or even in 1929.

"The essay should be weighed in the light of Scripture alone. The author, while respecting the persons and the products of our own denominational past, has proceeded to try to go behind our well-known formulations to the Scriptures themselves. There is no other source of doctrine for us.

"It is the author's conviction that the paper herewith released presents the Biblical point of view. Any reaction to it should be based only on Scriptural evidence. No other kind of response will be considered."

Asked if he had any comment on accusations and charges that he was propagating false doctrine concerning the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Scriptures, Dr. Scharlemann said many of his statements had been taken out of context and given a meaning foreign to the thrust of his essays.

It was necessary, he acknowledged, to "tear down" at times in order to build up a new concept of revela-

tion. In an essay presented to the Western District Pastoral Conference he said: "Now, if I come down heavy on the *Lutheran* view of this connection — well, this is because we call ourselves The *Lutheran* Church — Missouri Synod. I should want nothing so much as to have my church continue Lutheran."

Actually, he believes, "our faith rests on something bigger and stronger than definitions of inspiration and inerrancy. The Biblical concept of truth involves our entire relationship to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And what I have said and written was intended not to detract from the Scriptures but to enhance their magnitude."

Dr. Scharlemann added that he signed and wholeheartedly accepts the St. Louis seminary faculty's statement on "The Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures," which deals with inerrancy and other contemporary concerns.

While regretting the disturbance caused in the church because of his essays, Dr. Scharlemann said that he had "learned a great deal" and gained "new insights" through presentation and discussion of his essays. These insights will be reflected in an article scheduled to appear in the April 1961 issue of *Concordia Theological Monthly*. This article carries out his pledge to the seminary Board of Control that his exploratory essays "will need to be superseded by further and more carefully worded treatments appearing in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*, which is published by the faculty as a whole."

A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures

(Excerpts)

Adopted by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, April 26, 1960, as an expression of its position on the form and function of the Holy Scriptures.

I The Origin and Nature of the Scriptures

The Scriptures are given by divine inspiration according to both content and word. They are the result of a miraculous act of God and as such are the *Holy Scriptures*.

The authors of the Scriptures are witnesses and vessels of God's revelation. Chosen and inspired by the Spirit of God as His instruments, they record what God said and did in and through the historical events as they present them. In their words God discloses Himself as the Judge and Deliverer of man. He makes known His will for man in Jesus Christ, in whose death and resurrection this revelation has its

center. These human inspired words give men knowledge of the mind and work of God and are the media through which the Holy Spirit creates faith in Christ, turns men from darkness to light and from death to life, and thus moves them to submit to the will of God.

The Scriptures express what God wants them to say and accomplish what God wants them to do. In this sense and in the fulfillment of this function they are inerrant, infallible, and wholly reliable. Their truthfulness, their infallibility as the only rule of faith and practice, and their reliability are incontrovertible. There is no human or secular criterion by which their truth-

fulness, their infallibility as the only rule of faith and practice, and their reliability can be measured and made evident. This truthfulness, this infallibility as the only rule of faith and practice, and this reliability is known and can be asserted only in faith; those who believe the Scriptures, trust them, and rely on them are not put to shame, for the Scriptures neither go astray nor lead astray.

II The Function of the Scriptures

God Himself has spoken in the inspired words of the Scriptures, and it is God Himself who speaks to men today when this message in its various forms (preaching, Baptism, Sacrament

Form and Function

In more than a dozen meetings, St. Louis seminary president Alfred O. Fuerbringer told the WITNESS, members of the seminary faculty "studied the answers that Scriptures themselves give" to questions many Christians have been discussing in recent years: How do the Scriptures convey their message to us? When do they speak in literal terms, and when is their language that of imagination, poetry, or figure of speech? How are they properly understood and explained?

In 1960 the faculty published "A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures," a statement of the position "they had unanimously reached."

Members of the faculty could answer the questions under discussion, he pointed out, "only by viewing what the Bible itself regards its own purpose to be."

Three verses are cited in this connection:

2 Timothy 3:14-17: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we

through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me."

Because questions asked Dr. Fuerbringer deal with sections of the faculty statement, the WITNESS on this page presents excerpts from the document.

QUESTION: *Why does the statement emphasize that the authors of Scripture, as the witnesses and vessels of God's revelation, "record what God said and did in and through the historical events as they present them" and that the content of the Scriptures is "God's revelation of Himself in His dealings with His people for the salvation of all men through His Son Jesus Christ and God's action through the salvation by Jesus Christ by which He brings men to Himself and moves them to live His life"?*

Dr. Fuerbringer: Everything in the Scriptures has relevance and meaning only as it relates to God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Even the Ceremonial Law in the Old Testament reveals God in relation to His people. Whatever is recorded in the Scriptures reveals God's purpose to redeem His people, as St. Paul writes: "to make us wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness coming out of the God-inspired Scriptures are there "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

of the Altar, Power of the Keys, mutual conversation and consolation of brethren) is proclaimed in and by the church. Hence the Scriptures are both the source of the church's dogmas and the norm according to which all teachers and all the things that they teach are to be evaluated. They are reliable because they are the authoritative Word of God. In controversies, therefore, they alone are the final court of appeal and decision.

Lutherans declare their allegiance to the Holy Scriptures by subscribing to "the Lutheran Symbols as a true exposition of the Scriptures." Hereby they confess themselves to be in the succession of the church which remained loyal and obedient to the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures.

III The Interpretation of the Scriptures

The above considerations will provide the proper basis for (a) the interpreter's attitude toward the *content*

of the Scriptures—God's revelation of Himself in His dealings with His people for the salvation of all men through His Son Jesus Christ and God's action through the salvation by Jesus Christ by which He brings men to Himself and moves them to live His life; (b) the interpreter's attitude toward the *form* of the Scriptures as a divinely inspired revelation given by the Spirit of God through human beings speaking in terms and forms of their historical environment. . . .

If the interpreter by constant, dedicated, and prayerful study involves himself in the thought world of the Scriptures, he will be able to deal with form and content as an organic whole. He will be dealing with the Scriptures not as a *Scriptura mortua* [dead Scripture] but as the living Word of the living God in which God is continually active to make known and accomplish His will. The interpreter's life under the Scriptures as a living Word

of God will be the life of one who has by Baptism died to sin and lives to God. . . .

In the use of any method of interpretation the Christian interpreter will be cautious lest he set himself up as an authority over Scripture, or in any way distort or discredit the witness of Scripture. When he finds it impossible to explain to his satisfaction difficulties which he meets, he will reverently let them stand, remembering that in this life we know only "in part."

God is given all glory and honor when the Scriptures are accepted, interpreted, and obeyed as His Word, His revelation, as wholly reliable, and as able to accomplish their purpose.

This is done among us when we use the Scriptures according to God's purposes to admonish and edify our fellow Christians, and to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the multiplying numbers of non-Christians in this last time before Jesus Christ returns.

QUESTION: *The statement declares that the Scriptures "express what God wants them to say and accomplish what God wants them to do." It then continues: "In this sense and in the fulfillment of this function they are inerrant, infallible, and wholly reliable." Why the qualification "in this sense"? Are there other senses in which the Scriptures are not inerrant, infallible, and wholly reliable?*

Dr. F.: This sentence, as well as other sentences in the statement, must be understood in its context. The statement suggests that when anything, also secular or historical items, is presented in Scripture, it is given for the sake of God's purpose to redeem and sanctify His people and is to be used for that purpose. This is the bearing of 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and John 5:39.

The moment such items are employed without reference to the purpose for which God has had them narrated, we are discussing something which the Bible itself does not discuss. In other words, we cannot properly speak of "some other sense" than that intended by God and "the fulfillment of some other function" than that intended by God with regard to the Scriptures. To speak and think in that way of Scripture is to run the risk of using a human or secular criterion to measure the truthfulness of Scripture.

QUESTION: *In the next and succeeding sentences the word **inerrant** is dropped in favor of the word **truthfulness**, and the word **infallibility** is qualified three times — "Their infallibility as the only rule of faith and practice." Why?*

Our statement uses the word "inerrant" because we wish to make very clear that we deny that the Bible contains error. For that reason we echo our Confessions when we say in our statement "The Scriptures neither go astray nor lead astray." (See Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII, 13)

Unfortunately, however, a misplaced accent on the word "inerrancy" has led some people to unwarranted speculation. There are some people, for example, who on the basis of Leviticus 17:10 and Acts 15:20 believe that the Bible forbids blood transfusions. Various sects and groups compile a list of Biblical references to dress, diet, medicines, etc., and draw conclusions for which Biblical authority is claimed. The important thing is not to use the Bible for any purpose other than that which God intended.

Another thing to remember is that "truthful" is a very strong word. It does not merely say that there is *some* truth in the Sacred Scriptures but that they are completely truthful, *the* truth. The phrase "infallibility as the only rule of faith and practice" is not a limitation of the Scriptures but points everyone to the purpose for which they were written. John states the purpose of his Gospel and of the entire Bible as a matter of fact when he says: "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name." (John 20:31)

There is really no need to harmonize so-called difficulties in the Bible. We are not particularly interested in a harmonization of all the details of the four Gospels, for we know that each Gospel has its own thrust, each was written by a different inspired writer from his particular point of view and with the particular purpose that the Holy Spirit had for him.

To cite another example, each evangelist gives a different wording for the superscription on Christ's cross. We would not say that one of these wordings has to be right and that the others are wrong. Nor do we have to defend the truth of the Gospel accounts against these apparent discrepancies. Evidently the Holy Spirit was not interested in giving us the exact information. This is also what we mean when we say in the statement: "When he [the interpreter of the Scriptures] finds it impossible to explain to his satisfaction difficulties which he meets, he will reverently let them stand, remembering that in this life we know only 'in part.'"

QUESTION: *But doesn't such a viewpoint open the door to a "liberal" interpretation of such Biblical accounts as the creation, the fall, the flood, the exodus, etc.?*

Dr. F.: No. The interpreter who has the attitude our statement describes will not walk through that door. "Liberalism" results when the Scriptural message of sin and salvation is removed or watered down. If the interpreter's intention is, with the help of God, to keep that message just as clear and powerful as it is revealed in the Scriptures, he will avoid the danger of liberalism.

We always have to ask ourselves, "What does the text say? What does it say for me, my faith, and my salvation?" As I wrote to a pastor some time ago, if historical, geographical, and secular matters are presented in the Bible, it is God's intention that the reader search in them and in their context what God is saying to mankind about sin and salvation. Thus the creation story and the others you mention are in the Bible not merely for the purpose of giving a record of the origin and history of the world but to put man under the headship of God and make him responsible for his actions to God (note Psalm 19, 33; 2 Peter 2). The story of Israel, for example, in the exodus is there not simply to fill out a record of secular history but to reveal God's actions for His people (see Psalm 80). Isaiah 9 is not just to fill out the record of war and peace, the exile and return of Israel and Judah, but to indicate the mercy of God which comes to pass in Jesus the Christ. Therefore Scripture presents the truth of God also when its subject matter is historical, geographical, etc.

Hence our statement does not imply that secular or historical matters set forth in Scripture are negligible or unreliable, but that they are set forth in the Bible for the sake of God's revelation in Christ. (2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 5:39)

QUESTION: *God Himself has spoken in the inspired words of the Scriptures, according to the statement "and it is God Himself who speaks to men today when this*

message in its various forms (preaching, Baptism, Sacrament of the Altar, Power of the Keys, mutual conversation and consolation of brethren) is proclaimed in and by the church." Could one possibly infer that by equating the words of the Scriptures with the words spoken by Christians in their conversations the statement tends to play down the **uniquely divine character** of the Word of God?

Dr. F.: The Word of God is a living Word. The statement says of the interpreter that he "will be dealing with the Scriptures not as a *Scriptura mortua* [dead Scripture] but as the living Word of the living God in which God is continually active to make known and accomplish His will." Nowhere does the statement indicate that the Bible or any of its parts is not the Word of God. It is a living Word, and it is that when the humblest Christian speaks Gospel truth, when a pastor preaches the Good News, when a teacher teaches it from Luther's Small Catechism, when a person reads the Bible or sings the message of the Gospel in a hymn, or when the Word is used in connection with the administration of the Sacraments.

This in no way contradicts or plays down the statement in the Formula of Concord: "Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines [including every form of presentation mentioned] should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong."

QUESTION: *One more thing. Just what is meant by "theology moves"?*

Dr. F.: In His grace and at His pleasure our heavenly Father from time to time grants new theological insights. Today we are able to understand the various books of the Bible as to their language and historical, geographic, and cultural references much better than even a generation ago because of studies based on recent archaeological finds.

As we look back into the past, we also see that God in critical times gave special theological gifts, which are now our precious heritage. We think at once of the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions. We think also of the man Luther, whose dynamic teaching and writings not only influenced profoundly the theology of his day but, as his works are given serious study, also deeply affect contemporary theology. And as we carefully compare the writings of such theologians in our Synod's past as C. F. W. Walther, Franz Pieper, George Stoeckhardt, Ludwig Fuerbringer, and Fred Mayer, we gratefully acknowledge example after example which shows that theology did "move" for the benefit of the church.

The task of the theologian is affected by what goes on around him in our rapidly changing world. As new questions come up or as old problems present themselves with a new twist, the church and its teachers must go into motion, search for and formulate answers. Manifestly the answers can frequently not be found in books that were written before the questions arose. In-

fluent churchmen like Bishop James Pike or dynamic teachers and authors like Professors Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, John Baillie, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich confront contemporary man with a message that challenges his attention and offers him a solution of his difficulties and an answer to his questions. When such men speak and write, theologians of every denomination have the duty to examine these products, to "abhor that which is evil" and to "cleave to that which is good." (Romans 12:9)

The "Statement on Scripture" adopted by the Synodical Conference and its member Synods (see Feb. 24, 1959, WITNESS) is in this respect more contemporary than, for instance, the *Brief Statement*. The opening sentence of the "Statement on Scripture," "God reveals Himself to men primarily through His incarnate Son, whom He attests and presents to His church through Scripture," is a response to some of the concerns voiced by neo-orthodox theologians. There are other current theological problems to which our pastors and professors have addressed themselves.

Let me stress as heavily as I can that the question is not whether theology moves in a vacuum but that it should "move in" on people. The important thing for our church is not that we in every generation use the same words in our spoken and written theology but that we make sure that all of it is produced in humble obedience to God under the Scriptures, and for us that means within the framework of our Lutheran Confessions. In whatever way we aim to keep theology moving to meet current issues, we must stand firm in our loyalty to the Sacred Scriptures and to the precious heritage God has bequeathed to us through our fathers.

"Superseding Treatments"

When solutions to theological problems proposed by faculty members are questioned, church officials most immediately involved are the seminary's president, "the spiritual, academic, and administrative head" of the institution, and the group of which the president is the executive officer — the seminary's Board of Control.

Regulations of the synodical *Handbook* stipulate that this Board "shall foster and safeguard Synod's religious, academic, and financial interests in the institution."

"Our Board is continually aware of the need for preserving purity of doctrine," said Dr. George W. Wittmer, chairman of the Board of Control of the St. Louis seminary.

To safeguard Synod's religious interests, he pointed out, the Board of Control may call as professors and associate professors only men who have been previously nominated and attested to by congregations and members of Synod. Names of all nominees are published in Synod's official organs with reminders that objections and criticisms to candidates are to be communicated to the Board.

Before instructors and assistant professors are appointed, Dr. Wittmer added, they are always carefully

examined doctrinally and screened for spiritual and academic fitness.

To safeguard its religious interests, Synod also gives its Board of Control the specific directive to "duly investigate all the facts and circumstances . . . when members of the teaching or administrative staff are accused of willful neglect of official duties, or of conduct unbecoming a Christian, or of promulgation of and adherence to false doctrine."

"We were aware that the seminary faculty for a number of years was conducting thoroughgoing studies on the theology of the Word, and we knew that it planned to issue a statement formulating the results of this study," Dr. Wittmer noted.

Accordingly, when the Board received communications from individuals and pastoral conferences calling into question the teachings of some faculty members — also those of Dr. Scharlemann in his exploratory papers and his article in the *Lutheran Quarterly* — the Board advised the writers to discuss their concerns with faculty members and to await the faculty's statement on the problem.

The Board urged also that objectors follow proper Christian procedure by first consulting in Christian love with the author of the exploratory articles to determine whether he had been correctly understood and whether their fears of unscriptural teachings were real or supposed.

Demands, however, became more insistent that the essayist be suspended from the faculty and that the faculty itself be investigated. To reinforce such demands, memorials and resolutions were offered at a number of District conventions in the spring and summer of 1960. To take issue with such resolutions of censure, others introduced resolutions to express confidence in the faculty and its actions in the matter.

These pro and con "judgments" by Districts and conferences, Board members felt, were premature, pending the appearance and examination of the faculty statement on the Word, of which Dr. Scharlemann was a signatory, and in view of the Board's request for clarification of certain statements in his essays.

Opportunity for personal consultation with Dr. Scharlemann during this period was restricted by his absence from the campus, since he was on sabbatical leave and engaged in theological studies in New York City.

As requested by the Board, Dr. Scharlemann's clarifying statement explained why he presented the conference essays and the *Lutheran Quarterly* article "God Is One" in the manner he did; his method and purpose; his position on verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures; his view of the term *inerrancy*; and his attitude toward Synod's *Brief Statement*.

Explaining his procedure, Dr. Scharlemann stated his two essays, "intended to be of an exploratory nature only," were read at pastoral conferences at the invitation of their program committees "in an attempt to come to grips with the issue of the Scriptures as the

Word of God in terms of the 20th century." The essays were presented, he pointed out, prior to the time that the faculty adopted a policy "by which new problems will be discussed within the faculty itself before they are aired publicly."

The article "God Is One," he explained, was written prior to his two conference essays and had first been submitted to the editors of the *Concordia Theological Monthly*. "The staff, however, felt that it ought not to be published . . . because this journal does not as a matter of policy print items whose purpose is to open discussion of a particular problem. The article was then sent to the *Quarterly* because it does print items whose sole purpose is exploratory. And, once again, I had nothing else in mind than to begin a discussion.

"The notice that the article was to be printed came . . . at a time when I had almost forgotten that the item had been submitted. I asked the editor not to use it. He referred my request to the managing editor, who at that time was on a three-week vacation. During that interval the article was printed. Personally I regret that it did appear in print, because it lent itself to misunderstanding as an item that questioned the doctrine of God, when, in fact, it was written to show how God used certain historical situations to reveal more of Himself as time went along."

To state his position on the doctrine of inspiration, Dr. Scharlemann wrote: "I have at all times insisted on the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture. In fact, I have tried to point out that it is impossible to uphold and retain an adequate view of the authority of the Bible without a dynamic doctrine of inspiration that applies to the Scriptures in all their parts. That is to say, I accept every word of Scripture as being fully inspired and therefore the Word of God."

The suggestion made in his exploratory essays that "the term *inerrancy* ought no longer be used," Dr. Scharlemann explained, "was in no way intended to be either an attack on the doctrine of inerrancy or an assault against the Scripture itself. Whatever references were made to the Scriptures in this connection were selected to support the view that the use of this term (*inerrancy*) led some people to misunderstanding."

The St. Louis theologian added, however, that discussions with pastoral conferences, with the seminary faculty, and with the President and Vice-Presidents of Synod led him to the conclusion that "we must continue to use this word because among us this term stands for the complete truthfulness and utter reliability of every word in Scripture. And I, for my person, want no part in any activity which would tend to destroy this view of the perfection and majesty of the Scriptures."

His "concern for the use of the word *inerrancy*," Dr. Scharlemann said, is expressed in the statement drawn up by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (see page 15). He also voiced wholehearted acceptance of the statement prepared by the seminary faculty to deal with this and other contemporary concerns.

Concerning the *Brief Statement* Dr. Scharlemann expressed as his own considered opinion the view that "this document does not address itself to the particular question presently under discussion" since the *Brief Statement* was written before the rise of neo-orthodoxy. "At the same time," he added, "I am fully aware that all of us teachers at synodical institutions have a special responsibility to reflect the attitude and approach toward Scripture that is represented by this document. I have personally always accepted and believed the doctrinal content of the *Brief Statement*."

Meanwhile, because of a growing disturbance over this issue in many parts of the church, the Board urged those who made charges to meet with the Board of Control and Dr. Scharlemann so that conflicting views might be properly aired and possibly composed. These invitations were not accepted, however. The Board also requested that specific charges of false doctrine be submitted rather than vague and general indictments. These, too, according to Dr. Wittmer, were not forthcoming.

A number of early summer interviews followed with Dr. Scharlemann, President Fuerbringer, and Dr. Arthur C. Repp, academic dean. The Board also consulted with Synod's *Praesidium*.

In view of Dr. Scharlemann's clarifying statement to the Board of Control and of the St. Louis seminary faculty's "Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures" the Board resolved: "(1) that we do not agree with the mode of procedure and the methods that were used by Dr. Scharlemann in presenting his papers; (2) that we do not agree entirely with his theology* nor with the solutions of theological problems embraced in his papers; (3) that we do not find anything in his papers for which we would have to declare him guilty of heresy; and (4) that we intend to continue this matter through to a proper solution."

The Board added Part 4 to its resolution because Dr. Scharlemann had expressed the need to further clarify the intent and meaning of his essays. He stated:

"In the presentation of these items, it soon became obvious that, despite my own intentions, the methodology left much to be desired. There were sentences and even paragraphs in these papers that could be and were misunderstood without further and detailed explanation. For this reason these essays will need to be superseded by further and more carefully worded treatments appearing in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*."

* Theology in this connection is not to be understood as a body of doctrine but the science of theology, which includes the principles of interpretation. Throughout the history of our church there have been differences between some of our theologians in the interpretation and application of certain Bible texts. Frequently commentaries, such as *Popular Commentary of the Bible* by P. E. Kretzmann, on certain texts give several allowable interpretations. Different interpretations are allowable so long as they do not run counter to other clear teachings of Scripture.

The first of these "superseding treatments" will appear under the title "God's Acts as Revelation" in the April issue of the *CTM*.

Dr. Behnken's Letter

"Yes, we soon received a number of protests and objections to these essays," said Dr. John W. Behnken in answer to a leading question on the part taken by the *Praesidium* in resolving the problem.

"Therefore we urged — yes, we were very insistent that the president of our St. Louis seminary must bring Dr. Scharlemann together with the several pastors who accused him of heresy," Synod's President added.

Both the president of the St. Louis seminary and its Board of Control invited them to come for such a meeting, but they declined, he said.

Because Synod's constitution places upon its President chief responsibility for "the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of all officers of Synod and all such as are employed by Synod," as well as the Districts of Synod, President Behnken and the Vice-Presidents issued similar invitations on three different occasions. "Each time reply to the invitations was postponed until it was too late to meet."

Meanwhile, Synod's President and Vice-Presidents held a series of meetings with Dr. Scharlemann, particularly to review the judgment and decision of the Board of Control in finding nothing in his essays "for which we would have to declare him guilty of heresy."

After still another meeting of the *Praesidium*, the president and academic dean of the St. Louis seminary, and the pastoral members of the Board of Control to make sure that Dr. Scharlemann's statement on *inerrancy* was "clear-cut and unambiguous," it was agreed that Dr. Behnken address a letter to the pastors and teachers of Synod to inform them of "the facts."

In his letter, dated August 22, 1960, Dr. Behnken said: "We herewith wish to report that we are grateful that Dr. Scharlemann, who stated, 'As one feature of my exploratory essays, I made the suggestion that the term "inerrancy" ought no longer to be used,' has experienced a change of mind and heart."

President Behnken concluded this letter (reported in the *WITNESS*, Sept. 20, 1960, p. 17) by stating:

"We are thankful that God led Dr. Scharlemann to speak as he did. We believe him. We feel convinced that he will teach and defend the position which our Synod has ever held about the divine inspiration, the infallibility and inerrancy, and the unquestionable authority of Holy Writ. Our prayer is that God may graciously bless him and all our professors with deep loyalty to Holy Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions, with ever-increasing determination to train future workers in Christ's kingdom who will be faithful and conscientious in preserving the precious heritage which God has graciously entrusted to our beloved Synod.

"I sincerely hope that the above information may put an end to the disturbance. . . ."

They Need Our Prayers

This special report covers a large area and numerous questions which have been under study for several years. It must be understood, therefore, that the report does not include everything at issue. It is rather an endeavor to communicate to members of Synod — as objectively as possible — the facts contributing to a major theological problem.

Because space requirements for long-standing commitments will not permit the WITNESS in subsequent issues to publish reader reaction to the report, also because Synod's District Presidents are scheduled to meet and discuss with the *Praesidium* and the St. Louis and Springfield seminary faculties the issues and concerns raised by the problem, readers are urged to address their questions to Dr. Martin H. Scharlemann (1 Seminary Terrace North, St. Louis 5, Mo.), to the president of the St. Louis seminary (Dr. Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Concordia Seminary, 801 De Mun Ave., St. Louis 5, Mo.), to the chairman of the St. Louis seminary Board of Control (Dr. George W. Wittmer, 3543 Pestalozzi St., St. Louis 18, Mo.), to Synod's President (Dr. John W. Behnken, 210 N. Broadway, St. Louis 2, Mo.), and to their District Presidents.

Theological problems always have and always will exist — until God removes from us each taint of sin and by the grace of Jesus suffers us to see Him face to face, be like Him, and know Him even as we are known.

When one has interviews and conferences with such servants of the church as members of Synod's *Praesidium*, the faculty of the St. Louis seminary, and the seminary's Board of Control, one is almost over-

whelmed by the responsibilities they shoulder for the church in their respective positions.

These men always welcome intelligent, constructive criticism. All concerned in this report accepted wholeheartedly the WITNESS suggestion that questions concerning the report be addressed directly to them. These men also need the church's prayers that the resolution of this complex theological problem, under the Holy Spirit's direction, may bring blessing to the church and strengthen its witness to the world.

The world needs our witness to the life-giving Gospel of Christ. While the importance of theological problems is never to be minimized, the church cannot stand still and devote all its energies and resources exclusively to the pros and cons of a theological problem.

And this is no time — there never is a time — for individuals and groups to foster divisions in the church. Avowed enemies of Christ are feverishly busy in every nation of the world. The Communists of Russia and China are losing no time and sparing no cost to divide and conquer nations and churches.

Dear God and Father, drive us all to our knees in godly sorrow for our weaknesses and errors, our failure to worship Thee in spirit and in truth, our halting efforts to do Thy work while it is day. Lift our eyes to the forgiving, healing, ennobling, energizing love of Jesus. Unite us in Him for a clear, strong, Bible-centered witness to a world whose eternal destiny rests with Thee. Let us not be found wanting in doctrine and life, in Christian charity and burden-bearing, in zeal and fervor to advance Thy kingdom on earth. To Thee we commit our problems and our church, in the name of Jesus, our exalted Head.

Answers to "Testing Your Religious Vocabulary"

1. **Passover (B)** — Paschal (pronounced PAS-kal) is derived from the Hebrew word for Passover. In earlier New Testament times it became widely used for Easter, since Christ was the Fulfillment of the Passover lamb slain by the Israelites and the Christian Easter thus superseded the Old Testament Passover festival. The words of the Epistle for Easter: "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7) — also found in the Easter Gradual — no doubt exerted a strong influence in the continued use of "paschal" with reference to Easter. It occurs in the Communion preface for Easter ("He is the very Paschal Lamb"), in the Easter collect ("Thy Paschal Feast"), and in a number of well-known Easter hymns. (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, Nos. 190, 191, 195, 367)

2. **Cleanse (C)** — Though "purge" occurs some 30 times in the King James Version, it never in the slightest suggests a purgatory, where according to Roman Catholic teaching souls may be purified for entrance into heaven. The Bible speaks only of heaven and hell in the hereafter. (Matt. 7:13, 14; Rev. 14:13; Luke 23:43)

3. **Entrance (B)** — The Introit, consisting of a psalm verse and antiphon, introduces the main part of the morning worship and indicates the theme for the day. It follows the confession of sins and absolution.

4. **Deathlessness (A)** — Man's soul is called immortal because it has endless existence. In the resurrection also the mortal bodies of those who fall asleep in Jesus shall "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). By His death and resurrection Christ has "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy 1:10). Immortality is akin to, but not the same as, eternity, which means timelessness.

5. **Declare not guilty (C)** — Justify is a key Bible word which describes how God forgives sins: He declares the sinner just and free for Christ's sake, that is, because Christ by His suffering and death has paid in full the sinner's debt and punishment. This "not guilty" verdict of God, the sinner accepts by faith. Rom. 4:5: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

5. **Traveler (A)** — The Bible uses the word *pilgrim* to picture the Christian's life as a journey through a "foreign" land to the place where his true home and citizenship are — heaven (Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). For a beautiful unfolding of this picture read Paul Gerhardt's hymn "A Pilgrim and a Stranger" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 586). The early Massachusetts colonists were called Pilgrim Fathers because under persecution they left their English homeland to become exiles in Holland and later in the New World.